

Exciting plans to develop rail infrastructure in Oxford and introduce new services are moving forward

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Oxford City Council says a decision by government on the final funding for major improvements to its rail infrastructure is imminent and eagerly awaited. So far, the project has received £72.7 million for final design and enabling work, with a further £88.3 million needed to progress to the construction phase.

Following Oxford City Council's granting of 'Prior Approval' planning consent in autumn 2021, Network Rail is busy finalising designs for a new Western Entrance and additional platform at Oxford Railway station.

These enhancements will enable more passenger services to run and give extra capacity for freight services running to and through Oxfordshire.

The plans also include a larger replacement rail over-bridge at Botley Road, which will provide much improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians.

This expansion of the station will bring a much-needed increase in capacity and help pave the way for further rail projects in the county, such as the re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line for passenger use.

The reintroduction of passenger services along the Cowley Branch Line is a key feature of strategic transport plans for Oxford and Oxfordshire. Currently, the Cowley Branch Line is only used for taking finished cars from the BMW-Mini Plant Cowley to the Port of Southampton for export.

Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council are working closely with Network Rail on designs for two new passenger rail stations at Oxford Business Park; adjacent to the Tesco superstore and at Oxford Science Park, including how these will readily connect to local communities and nearby planned new developments.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council, said: "We want to see the Government make a commitment to provide immediate and sustained funding for rail improvements in Oxford and across Oxfordshire. Better rail links from the East to the West of the country would provide huge benefits to link key knowledge and innovation centres in Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge.

"The expansion of Oxford Station is much needed to support additional passenger services, provide more capacity for nationally important rail freight and assist in the delivery of the wider redevelopment across the West End. These improvements will help us give local residents, as well as visitors to our city, better options and help us improve our air quality.

"In particular, introducing passenger services on the Cowley Branch Line will make journeys to the City Centre and beyond much quicker for people living in the south and east of Oxford, and is something that we have been campaigning for over many years."

Re-opening the line for passenger travel would give fast connections into the city centre from the south and east of the city, serving areas such as Littlemore and Blackbird Leys.

Early proposals indicate a half-hourly service running to/ from London Marylebone (via Oxford railway station), with trains taking as little as seven to nine minutes from the new stations to the centre of the city and providing direct connections to Oxford Parkway and Bicester.

Running passenger services on the Cowley Branch Line will help support the City's economic inclusion strategy, as improved transport connectivity will help open up employment and business opportunities.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Travel and Development Strategy, said: "Oxfordshire is a welcome crossroads for rail, and the new station, along with the expansion of the Cowley Branch, are key priorities identified in the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study.

"As we work to reduce the need for car journeys, and to make active travel and public transport better and safer, rail improvements like these will be essential in addressing the climate emergency and tackling inequalities in the county."

Anneliese Dodds, MP for Oxford East, said: "I have long campaigned for the re-opening of the Cowley Branch line to passengers, and it's great to see both local councils working hard for this too.

"Re-opening the line would massively speed up travel into the city centre and beyond, for residents in

Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, Cowley and elsewhere.

"I will continue to push for urgent action to re-open the line, for the sake of local residents."

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